

Annual earnings of young adults, by educational attainment

Many factors influence wages and salaries, including employer's perceptions of the productivity and availability of workers with different levels of education and prevailing economic conditions. The ratio of annual earnings of high school dropouts or college graduates to the annual earnings of high school completers measures the earnings disadvantage of not finishing high school and the earnings advantage of completing college.

- In 1997, the median annual earnings of young adults ages 25–34 who had not completed high school were substantially lower than those of their counterparts who had done so (29 and 37 percent lower for males and females, respectively). Young adults who had completed a bachelor's degree or higher earned substantially more than those who had earned no more than a high school diploma or GED (50 and 91 percent more for males and females, respectively).
- Between 1980 and 1997, the earnings of those with a bachelor's degree or higher rose faster than the earnings of those who had completed only high school for both males and females.
- Gaps in earnings between males and females decline with increasing levels of education: as educational attainment increases, the ratio of median annual earnings of male to female wage and salary workers decreases. However, the association between education and the male/female earnings gap has lessened over time. That is, earnings of women achieved greater parity with the earnings of men in recent years, regardless of level of educational attainment (see supplemental table 12-1).

Ratio¹ of median annual earnings of all wage and salary workers ages 25–34 whose highest education level was grades 9–11, some college, or a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with those with a high school diploma or GED, by sex: 1970–97

Year	Grades 9–11		Some college		Bachelor's degree or higher	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1970 ²	0.83	0.59	1.09	1.20	1.24	1.82
1972 ²	0.79	0.63	1.01	1.18	1.18	1.79
1974	0.81	0.62	1.02	1.19	1.14	1.74
1976	0.78	0.61	1.03	1.14	1.19	1.58
1978	0.77	0.54	1.05	1.17	1.18	1.55
1980	0.73	0.65	1.04	1.24	1.19	1.52
1982	0.71	0.66	1.12	1.21	1.34	1.63
1984	0.63	0.56	1.15	1.21	1.36	1.61
1986	0.69	0.65	1.18	1.21	1.50	1.78
1988	0.68	0.56	1.10	1.31	1.42	1.81
1990	0.71	0.58	1.14	1.34	1.48	1.92
1991	0.64	0.64	1.14	1.32	1.53	1.90
1992	0.68	0.76	1.13	1.34	1.60	2.00
1993	0.67	0.59	1.12	1.31	1.57	1.99
1994 ²	0.67	0.58	1.14	1.20	1.52	1.86
1995 ²	0.74	0.61	1.11	1.28	1.55	1.91
1996 ²	0.69	0.64	1.14	1.27	1.56	1.88
1997	0.71	0.63	1.11	1.22	1.50	1.91

¹ This ratio is most useful when compared with 1.0. For example, the ratio of 1.50 in 1997 for males whose highest education level was a bachelor's degree or higher means that they earned 50 percent more than males who had a high school diploma or GED. The ratio of 0.71 in 1997 for males whose highest education level was grades 9–11 means that they earned 29 percent less than males who had a high school diploma or GED.

² Data revised from previously published figures.

NOTE: The Current Population Survey (CPS) questions used to obtain educational attainment were changed in 1992. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 59* for further discussion. In 1994, the survey instrument for the CPS was changed and weights were adjusted. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 51* for further discussion.

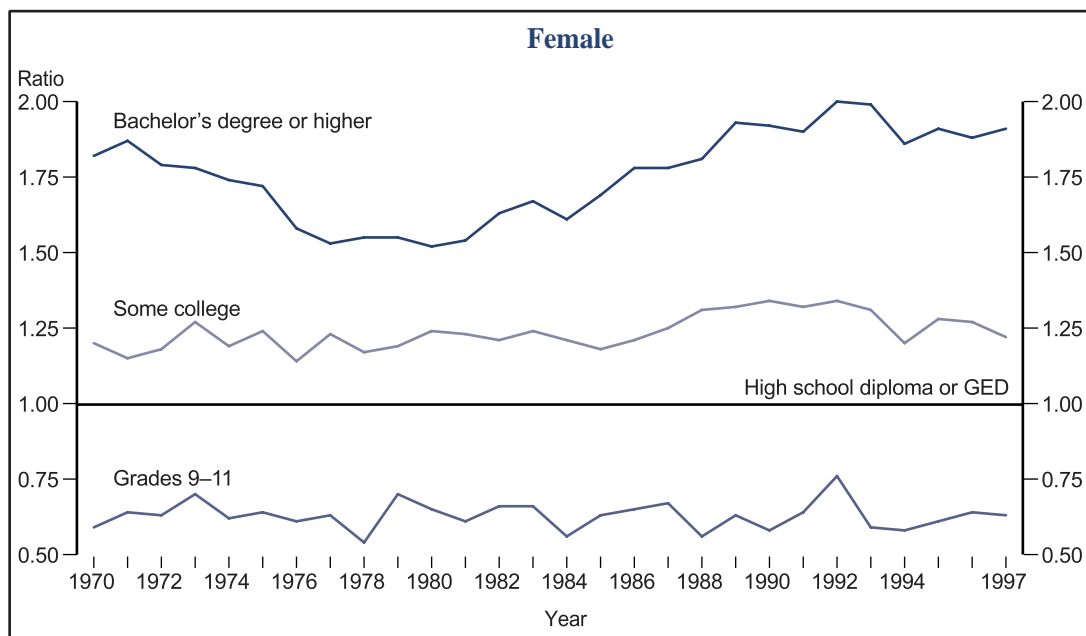
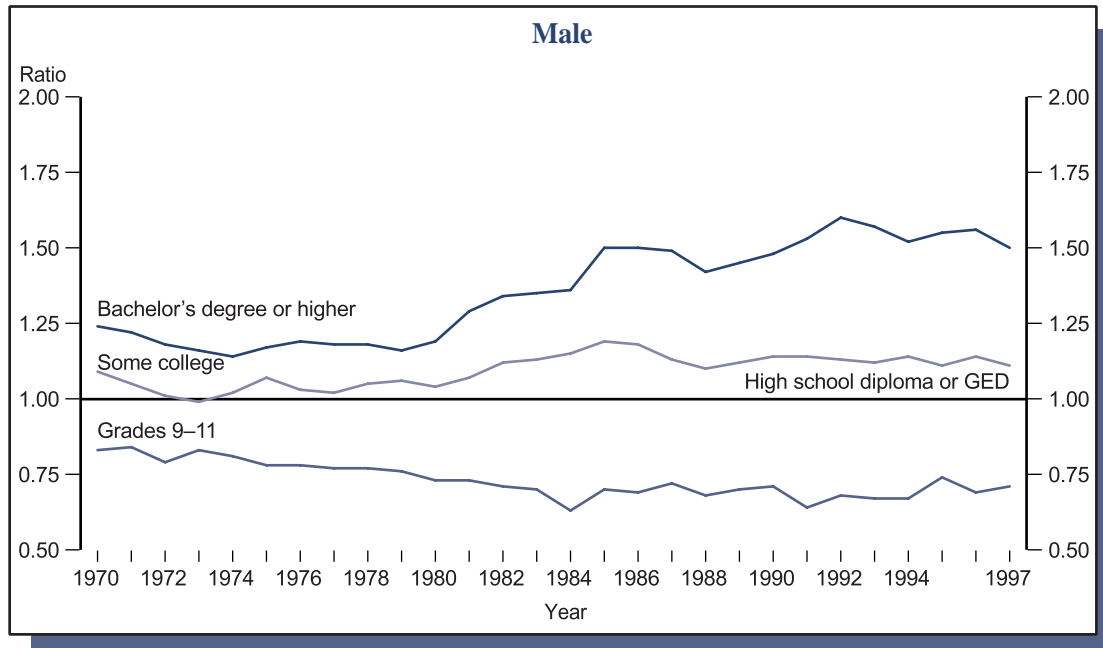
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, March Current Population Surveys.

Table S12 **Standard errors for the text table in *Indicator 12***

Year	Grades 9-11		Some college		Bachelor's degree or higher	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
1970	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.09	0.02	0.09
1972	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.07	0.02	0.07
1974	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.06
1976	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.05
1978	0.03	0.02	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.05
1980	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04
1982	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.03	0.02	0.05
1984	0.03	0.04	0.04	0.03	0.05	0.04
1986	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.04
1988	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.04	0.03
1990	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.04
1991	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04
1992	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.05
1993	0.03	0.03	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.06
1994	0.03	0.04	0.03	0.03	0.03	0.05
1995	0.02	0.03	0.03	0.04	0.05	0.06
1996	0.02	0.04	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.05
1997	0.02	0.05	0.02	0.04	0.03	0.05

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census,
March Current Population Surveys.

Ratio* of median annual earnings of all wage and salary workers ages 25–34 whose highest education level was grades 9–11, some college, or a bachelor's degree or higher, compared with those with a high school diploma or GED, by sex: 1970–97



* This ratio is most useful when compared with 1.0. For example, the ratio of 1.50 in 1997 for males whose highest education level was a bachelor's degree or higher means that they earned 50 percent more than males who had a high school diploma or GED. The ratio of 0.71 in 1997 for males whose highest education level was grades 9–11 means that they earned 29 percent less than males who had a high school diploma or GED. Data for 1994, 1995, and 1996 are revised from previously published figures.

NOTE: The Current Population Survey (CPS) questions used to obtain educational attainment were changed in 1992. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 59* for further discussion. In 1994, the survey instrument for the CPS was changed and weights were adjusted. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 51* for further discussion.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, March Current Population Surveys.

Table 12-1 Ratio* of median annual earnings of all male to all female wage and salary workers ages 25–34, by educational attainment: 1970–97

Year	Grades 9–11	High school completer	Some college	Bachelor's degree or higher
1970	3.40	2.42	2.21	1.64
1971	3.09	2.36	2.17	1.54
1972	3.01	2.40	2.05	1.59
1973	2.93	2.47	1.93	1.61
1974	3.05	2.35	2.00	1.55
1975	2.65	2.17	1.87	1.47
1976	2.70	2.10	1.91	1.58
1977	2.56	2.08	1.74	1.60
1978	3.05	2.14	1.92	1.63
1979	2.24	2.08	1.84	1.55
1980	2.22	1.95	1.64	1.53
1981	2.23	1.86	1.61	1.56
1982	1.90	1.77	1.64	1.46
1983	1.86	1.76	1.61	1.43
1984	1.94	1.73	1.64	1.46
1985	1.86	1.66	1.67	1.47
1986	1.80	1.67	1.62	1.41
1987	1.78	1.66	1.50	1.38
1988	2.09	1.73	1.45	1.35
1989	1.95	1.75	1.49	1.32
1990	2.04	1.65	1.42	1.27
1991	1.66	1.65	1.42	1.32
1992	1.42	1.59	1.34	1.27
1993	1.82	1.60	1.37	1.26
1994	1.79	1.54	1.46	1.26
1995	1.89	1.58	1.37	1.28
1996	1.73	1.61	1.44	1.33
1997	1.77	1.57	1.44	1.24

* This ratio is most useful when compared with 1.0. For example, the ratio of 1.24 in 1997 for those whose highest education level was a bachelor's degree or higher means that males who had attained a bachelor's degree or higher earned 24 percent more than females with the same level of educational attainment.

NOTE: The Current Population Survey (CPS) questions used to obtain educational attainment were changed in 1992. See the

supplemental note to *Indicator 60* for further discussion. In 1994, the survey instrument for the CPS was changed and weights were adjusted. See the supplemental note to *Indicator 52* for further discussion.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, March Current Population Surveys.

Table S12-1 Standard errors for table 12-1

Year	Grades 9-11	High school completion	Some college	Bachelor's degree or higher
1970	0.25	0.08	0.15	0.06
1971	0.21	0.08	0.14	0.05
1972	0.25	0.08	0.10	0.05
1973	0.21	0.07	0.08	0.04
1974	0.23	0.06	0.07	0.04
1975	0.14	0.06	0.06	0.04
1976	0.20	0.05	0.07	0.04
1977	0.21	0.05	0.05	0.04
1978	0.16	0.06	0.07	0.04
1979	0.14	0.05	0.05	0.03
1980	0.16	0.04	0.04	0.03
1981	0.13	0.04	0.04	0.04
1982	0.13	0.04	0.04	0.03
1983	0.12	0.04	0.04	0.03
1984	0.14	0.06	0.04	0.04
1985	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.03
1986	0.11	0.03	0.05	0.03
1987	0.11	0.03	0.04	0.03
1988	0.14	0.03	0.04	0.03
1989	0.16	0.03	0.04	0.03
1990	0.16	0.03	0.04	0.03
1991	0.14	0.03	0.04	0.03
1992	0.09	0.04	0.03	0.02
1993	0.12	0.04	0.03	0.02
1994	0.14	0.04	0.04	0.02
1995	0.10	0.05	0.04	0.04
1996	0.12	0.04	0.03	0.02
1997	0.15	0.04	0.03	0.03

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census,
March Current Population Surveys.